Religious Programs

1015.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidance regarding the right of inmates to exercise their religion and for evaluating accommodation requests for faith-based religious practices of inmates.

1015.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Compelling government interest - A method for determining the constitutionality of a policy that restricts the practice of a fundamental right. In order for such a policy to be valid, there must be a compelling government interest, which is necessary or crucial to the mission of the Office, as opposed to something merely preferred, that can be furthered only by the policy under review.

Least restrictive means - A standard imposed by the courts when considering the validity of policies that touch upon constitutional interests. If the Office adopts a policy that restricts a fundamental religious liberty, it must employ the least restrictive measures possible to achieve its goal.

Religious exercise - Any exercise of religion, whether or not it is compelled by, or central to, a system of religious belief. The key is not what a faith requires but whether the practice is included in the inmate's sincerely held religious beliefs.

Substantial burden - For the purposes of this policy, substantial burden means either of the following:

- A restriction or requirement imposed by the Office that places an inmate in a position of having to choose between following the precepts of his/her religion and forfeiting benefits otherwise generally available to other inmates, or having to abandon one of the precepts of his/her religion in order to receive a benefit.
- The Office puts considerable pressure on an inmate to substantially modify his/her behavior in violation of his/her beliefs.

1015.2 POLICY

This office permits inmates to engage in the lawful practices and observances of their sincerely held religious beliefs consistent with the legitimate penological objectives of the facility. Facility staff will not allow their personal religious beliefs to influence them in the daily management of the inmate population, particularly as it relates to religious practices. This office shall not show favoritism or preference to any religion and will not discriminate or retaliate against any inmate for participating or not participating in any religion or religious practice. Inmates are not required to participate in religious programs or activities.

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1015.3 CHAPLAIN

(a) Under the supervision of the Support Services Captain, the Jail Ministries Coordinator will establish a schedule of religious services and counseling which will be available to inmates on a voluntary basis. The Jail Ministries Coordinator will provide liaison with local community religious organizations, scheduling times that approved clergy, counselors, and volunteers may visit inmates and conduct services.

(b) The Volunteer Chaplain(s) will assist in determining the religious needs of the inmates through personal contact with them. They will be assisted by Corrections Bureau members, as needed, as they move through the facilities ascertaining the needs of and ministering to the needs of the inmates.

1015.4 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

Inmates are not required to identify or express a religious belief. An inmate may designate any belief, or no belief, during the intake process and may change a designation at any time by declaring their religious belief in writing to the chaplain. Inmates seeking to engage in religious practices shall submit a request through the established process. Requests to engage in practices that are on the facility's list of accepted practices should be granted. Requests to engage in religious practices that are not on the approved list shall be processed as provided in this policy. All requests for accommodation of religious practices shall be treated equally, regardless of the religion that is involved. Equal and consistent treatment of all religions and religious beliefs shall not always require that all inmates of the same religion receive the same accommodations. Requests for accommodation of religious practices shall be submitted to a jail ministries coordinator. In determining whether to grant or deny a request for accommodation of religious practice, the supervisor will work with the chaplain to determine the sincerity of the religious claim of an inmate. Requests should be denied only if the denial or reason for denial would further a compelling interest of the facility and is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling interest.

Members shall be informed of all approved accommodations. The Jail ministries coordinator should make any necessary notifications to staff as necessary to meet an approved accommodation

All inmate requests for religious accommodations and related determinations shall be fully documented in the inmate's record.

1015.4.1 SUSPENSION OR REVOCATION OF ACCOMMODATIONS

In an emergency or extended disruption of normal facility operations, the Chief Deputy of Corrections may suspend any religious accommodation. The Chief Deputy of Corrections may also revoke or modify an approved religious accommodation if the accommodated inmate violates the terms or conditions under which the accommodation was granted.

1015.4.2 APPEALS OF SUSPENSION OR REVOCATION OF ACCOMMODATIONS

Inmates may appeal the Chief Deputy of Corrections’s denial, suspension or revocation of an accommodation through the inmate appeal process.

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1015.5 DIETS AND MEAL SERVICE

The Thurston County Sheriff's Office Corrections Bureau will provide inmates who have religious beliefs that require special diets the means to fulfill their dietary needs, within limited institutional resources and the need for facility security,

1015.6 HAIRSTYLES AND GROOMING

Unless it is necessary for the health and sanitation of the facility, inmates who wear head and facial hair in the observance of their religion will generally not be required to shave or cut their hair. To the extent reasonably practicable, alternative housing may be considered to accommodate the need for religious hair and grooming, while meeting the health and sanitation needs of the facility.

Any inmate whose appearance is substantially altered due to changes in facial hair or hair length may be required to submit to additional identification photographs.

1015.7 RELIGIOUS VISITS

Clergymen, religious counselors, and volunteers may visit with inmates using the Video Visitation process. Inmates will be allowed two (2) free (1/2 hour each) video visitations a week on site from the Correctional Options facility. If these have already been used when the inmate or clergymen request a visit, there may be a fee associated with the visit.

Exceptions may be made to this, on a pre-approved and arranged basis, during times that do not interfere with the normal functions or security of the facility.

Pre-approved clergy or religious counselors may be permitted to visit outside of regular visiting hours with approval from the Support Services or Operations Captains, or designee.

1015.8 UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICES OR MATERIAL

The following list, which is not intended to be exhaustive, includes materials or practices that shall not be authorized:

(a) Animal sacrifice

(b) Language or behaviors that could reasonably be construed as presenting a threat to facility safety or security

(c) Self-mutilation

(d) Use, display or possession of weapons

(e) Self-defense or military training

(f) Disparagement of other religions

(g) Nudity or sexual acts

(h) Profanity

(i) Use of illegal substances or controlled substances without a prescription

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1015.9 GROUP RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Religious services will be provided in accordance with schedules posted in the housing areas. The services will be non-denominational and open to all inmates who would like to attend.

The location for these services will be determined by the Housing Deputy in the Dormitories. Depending on how many participants there are, the services could be held in the Classroom or Dormitory Dayroom. Inmates not choosing to participate in the service will not usually be locked down during the service as long as they are respectful of the inmates attending the service.

Bible Studies

The Jail Ministries Coordinator and/or Volunteer Chaplain will normally ensure that bible or other religious study seminars will be made available and conducted in designated areas on a weekly basis. This program will be completed in accordance with the schedules posted in the Dormitories.

1015.10 RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS AND IMPLEMENTS

Religious symbols and implements used in the exercise of religion should generally be allowed unless the symbol or implement poses a threat to the safety and security of the facility. Alternatives to the provision of religious symbols and implements may be considered when security, safety or efficient operations may be jeopardized (e.g., substitution of a towel in lieu of a prayer rug).

1015.11 RELIGIOUS GARMENTS AND CLOTHING

Inmates who practice a religion that requires particular modes of dress, garments, headgear, etc., other than standard-issue clothing, should generally be accommodated subject to the need to identify inmates and maintain security.

Head coverings shall be searched before being worn in the housing areas of the facility and shall be subject to random searches for contraband. Personal head coverings should be exchanged in favor of office-supplied head coverings when available and appropriate.

Inmates wearing headscarves or other approved coverings shall not be required to remove them while in the presence of or while visible to the opposite sex, if they so desire. Religious garments that substantially cover the inmate’s head and face shall be temporarily removed during the taking of booking and identification photographs.

To the extent reasonably practicable, alternative housing may be considered to accommodate an inmate’s need for religious attire, while meeting the security needs of the facility.

1015.12 SPACE AND EQUIPMENT FOR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

The Chief Deputy of Corrections shall ensure that there is adequate work space, equipment and furnishings for the chaplain to serve the inmate population, including providing access to areas of the facility. Space for group worship will be dictated by the availability of secure areas and the classification status of the inmates to be served. All recognized religious groups should have equal access to the space, equipment and services which the facility normally provides for religious purposes.

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1015.13 COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The chaplain may minister his/her particular faith and any other similar faiths to inmates but should also establish contacts with clergy of other faiths, who can provide services to inmates of other religious denominations.

Whenever the chaplain is unable to represent or provide faith-based services to an inmate, a religious leader or other volunteer from the community should be sought to help provide services. Individuals providing faith-based services must possess the appropriate credentials from the recognized leadership of the particular faith. All faith-based services provided through community resources should be supervised by the chaplain. All efforts to contact faith-based representatives should be documented and retained in accordance with established records retention schedules.

Volunteers are another valuable resource that could be utilized extensively in the delivery of the religious program (see the Volunteer Program Policy). A volunteer could ensure that religious personnel who provide programming in the facility possess the required credentials and have the security clearance to enter the facility.

The chaplain, in cooperation with the Chief Deputy of Corrections or the authorized designee, shall develop and maintain communication with faith communities. The chaplain shall review offers to donate equipment or materials for use in the religious program and shall approve these offers when appropriate. All communication efforts should be documented and retained in accordance with established records retention schedules.

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